

an extremely irritated and pugnacious Bronz-winged Jacana chasing and driving away almost all the birds which came to visit the tank for foraging, which included Cotton Teal, Lesser Whistling Teal, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, etc. It even chased and drove away a White-breasted Kingfisher and compelled a Little Grebe, an actual resident of the tank, to leave the place. I discovered that the hostile behaviour of the bird was only to protect the wounded chick which was unable to move with the others and was only able to feebly paddle in a small pool of water cleared by a parent bird by pushing or pulling apart the thick floating

aquatic weeds with its bill. This rather cumbersome and laborious process of making clear spaces in the thickly entangled mass of aquatic weeds was observed to be performed repeatedly whenever the chick intended to move about. This behaviour of assistance to the wounded chick lasted till the midday of 5th October when the chick died.

During the period of observation, the three other broodmates of the unfortunate chick were unattended by the parent, but were found to be behaving normally like typical precocial chicks.

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ZOOLOGICAL SURVEY OF INDIA,
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December 20, 1977.

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8. BLACKNECKED CRANE IN BHUTAN AND ARUNACHAL PRADESH—A SURVEY REPORT FOR JANUARY-FEBRUARY 1978

For studying the status of the allegedly rare Blacknecked Crane, *Grus nigricollis* Przevalski, in the eastern Himalaya during winter, the Bombay Natural History Society, the Zoological Survey of India and the World Wildlife Fund—India, organised a joint expedition to Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh during January-February 1978. Due to unavoidable reasons Dr. Sálím Ali of the BNHS and Dr. B. Biswas of the ZSI could not join the team. Mr. K. S. Lavkumar of the World Wildlife Fund—India and I from the Zoological Survey of India, therefore, conducted the survey. Earlier under the leadership of Dr. Sálím Ali, an expedition in search of the breeding ground of the crane had been undertaken in Ladakh during June-August of 1976, when the BNHS, the ZSI and the WWF-India, participated.

On the basis of the report by F. N. Betts (1954) from the Apatani Valley, Subansiri District of Arunachal Pradesh and the report furnished by Dr. B. Biswas, who led a faunistic exploration in central and eastern Bhutan from the Zoological Survey of India and actually found the cranes in the Tashi Yangtshi Valley in eastern Bhutan during 1973, together with the information supplied by the forest department of the Govt. of Bhutan, Central and Eastern Bhutan and Subansiri District (Apatani Valley in particular) in Arunachal Pradesh were chosen for the study.

ITINERARY:

In Bhutan: 11 Jan. 1978. Dep. Calcutta
15 Jan. 1978. Arr. Bumthang (Cham-
khar Chu Valley), central Bhutan
20 Jan. 1978. Dep. Bumthang

(Due to road blocks produced by heavy snowfall in the higher reaches, the party was unable to proceed further east to the Tashi Yangtse Valley. It left Bhutan on 23 Jan. 1978).

In Arunachal Pradesh: 24 Jan. 1978. Arr. Itanagar
27 Jan. 1978. Dep. Tarajuli
(near Itanagar)
28 Jan. 1978. Arr. Apatani
Valley (at Hapoli)
29-31 Jan. 1978. Halt at
Tale Valley
1 Feb. 1978. Dep. Apatani
Valley
2 Feb. 1978. Arr. Daporizo
4 Feb. 1978. Dep. Daporiza
5 Feb. 1978. Arr. Tarajuli
6-12 Feb. 1978. Halt at Tarajuli
13 Feb. 1978. Dep. Tarajuli
15 Feb. 1978. Arr. Calcutta.

The Blacknecked Crane a bird of the Tibetan Plateau, inhabited the grassy shores or reed-beds on the shores of the lakes of the Tibetan Plateau, or on their islands. It ranges from Ladakh in Kashmir east to Koko Nor region of Tibet and is believed to be migratory. Very little was known about this beautiful crane. In recent years, the Zoological Survey of India team, headed by Dr. B. Biswas found nine birds in the Tashi Yangtse Valley in eastern Bhutan during November of 1973. And lastly, in 1976, the breeding birds with nestlings were found in Ladakh by the joint expedition team headed by Dr. Sálím Ali.

Altogether we came across sixteen Black-necked Cranes during our stay in Bhutan. At Gyetsa, 42 Km east of Tongsa, in the Kagang Chu Valley, a pair was seen foraging in the bogs as well as in the cultivated fields, soaked with melting snow. At Byakar, in Bumthang area, in the Chamkher Chu Valley, fourteen birds were seen. The composition of the flocks in Bumthang was nine adult and five juvenile birds. The flock broke up into family parties during the daylight hours. There were two

pairs with two young, one pair with single young, one pair without any young, and a singleton male. The family parties collected in a flock at their roost before dusk. Segregated family parties were observed throughout the daylight hours, foraging in feeding grounds, usually in the bogs and marshes as well as in the ploughed fields. Each party maintained its own feeding territory. The gap between the feeding territories were usually about a kilometre or more. Only the mateless male was seen foraging near the couple without young. But he was not allowed to come closer than about a hundred metre or so. Each family party, even with the young foraged in its own particular field. Young fed independently of their parents but their movements from place to place or when alarmed were always together. Before dusk, each party came down to a particular field not far from the roost, where they had their last feed. The congregated family parties had their preening and other rituals and just at dusk, they simultaneously left for their roosting ground in a marshy fallow field at the foot of a hillock somewhat away from the river bed. Whether at their last feeding ground or at roost, the parties maintained their separate entities. At daybreak, the parties were seen coming out one after another over the river and settling on their respective feeding grounds. Usually they foraged in a particular field throughout the day unless disturbed. They took no notice of the local people in traditional costumes and would allow them to come within about 20 metres, or so, but were visibly suspicious and cautious at the sight of persons not in the familiar apparel. They became alert and agitated at the report of a .22 rifle and invariably left the feeding ground, suggesting a familiarity with firearm sounds apparently in their breeding grounds, as they have never been shot at in Bhutan. On the day

we left Bumthang, a fresh pair was seen. This, apparently, was the pair we saw at Gyetsa on 15 January, for we did not see it there on our return journey.

In the Apatani Valley, Subansiri District of Arunachal Pradesh, the recorded wintering ground of the Blacknecked Crane, a thorough search for the bird was conducted, but without any success. The crane is a well known bird and has found its place in the folk-lore. Information from local sources suggests that some twenty years back flocks of twenty or thirty Blacknecked Crane used to land in the Apatani Valley during the winter, when on such an occasion F. N. Betts encountered them in 1954. At that time the bird enjoyed protection from the local inhabitants. Since then,

however, its population in the valley has started dwindling, chiefly due to human interference by way of hunting. Over the years, apparently, the habits of the local inhabitants has changed. During recent years, the free use of firearms, has made persecution of this bird much easier, so that the population of the Blacknecked Crane has now dwindled alarmingly, so much so that during the last two years no crane has been sighted in the Apatani Valley. The last pair that appeared in the Apatani Valley near Hang Village in February of 1975 was soon collected for the pot within an hour or so of its landing. Since then cranes are not flying over this otherwise beautiful country, an erstwhile favourite wintering ground.

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SUBHENDU SEKHAR SAHA

9. THE BLUECHECKED BEE-EATER *MEROPS SUPERCILIOSUS* LINNAEUS IN KUTCH

The Bluecheeked Bee-eater has so far been believed to be only a passage migrant in Kutch. However on June 25, this year I saw one young bird which appeared to have just left its nest, since it kept on sitting in the same position on an electric wire and was being frequently fed by one adult bird. This was at the Devisar Tank, about 16 kms. north of Bhuj. While I, along with the local bird-enthusiasts, Messers Bapat, Varu and others, watched this young bee-eater no other adult bird except one was seen. Almost all the insects caught and fed to the young were dragonflies (sp ?). The parent bird, after catching its prey, would settle down at some distance on the wire and only after properly killing the

insect feed the young one. This, I think, is the first breeding record of this bee-eater in Kutch.

Dr. Sálím Ali did not come across the Bluecheeked Bee-eater in Kutch in any season except during their outward passage migration in Sept.-Oct. They are known to breed in Saurashtra (Dharmakumarsinhji—BIRDS OF SAURASHTRA—specific breeding areas not mentioned). I have seen them off and on in Kutch during summer. I first came across the bird on May 2, 1950; this too was at the same place (Devisar), and I saw them in the Banni on October 6, 1950, then on November 8, 9, 10, 1973 on the sea coast of Mandvi in scattered parties in a stretch of about 19 kms. from